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ABSTRACT

School systems interested in improving teacher performance, effectiveness, and job satisfaction while reducing turnover rates might do better to seek ways to enhance the intrinsic rewards of teaching rather than implement such extrinsic motivators as merit pay plans and career ladders. A review of the research literature brings several important considerations to light: (1) teachers tend to oppose merit pay plans, though they may accept a performance-based component among several criteria determining salary increases; (2) the success of merit pay plans in the private sector is debatable; (3) money is an uncertain motivator among teachers; (4) teachers are not all motivated by the same needs and desires; (5) conditions affecting motivation are continually changing; (6) people often enter the teaching profession to obtain intrinsic rewards related to service and self-esteem; (7) the availability of external motivation often inhibits the effects of intrinsic motivation; and (8) merit pay and career ladders tend to deprofessionalize teaching. Intrinsic motivation for teachers as professionals can be enhanced through such processes as performance appraisal interviews, appraisal and development of potential, feedback and performance coaching, career planning, training, organizational development, rewards for specific contributions, employee welfare programs, and use of human resources databanks. (PGD)

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Career Ladders and the Professionalization of Teaching: Down the Up Staircase

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Career Ladders and the Professionalization of Teaching: Down the Up Staircase

Robert R. Dunwell

Introduction

In part because of the urging of the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), the American public and American education appear to have arrived at some kind of agreement that the two most critical problems now facing teaching are: (1) the lack of teachers with quality educational backgrounds, and (2) the lack of career incentives sufficient to retain the most talented teachers (English, 1984). Within the past two years, a majority of our state legislatures have enacted education reform bills to implement or mandate the development of performance-based incentive programs (e.g., merit pay) or career ladder programs (See Footnote 1 for a list of these states).

Although there is considerable agreement that the quality of teaching service should be rewarded, controversy abounds over the fairness, validity, and reliability of current implementation procedures (Castetter, 1986). Yet while legislators, school board officials, and educators argue over why it is so difficult to implement a differential reward system, the conventional wisdom of the general public suggests a direct solution: (1) teaching is a relatively simple job, and the evaluation of teaching must be relatively simple, and (2) money will motivate highly qualified people to enter teaching and persuade them to stay in teaching (English, et al., 1986).

The notion of differential salaries for teachers is not new; differentials based de facto on the sex of the teacher have been eliminated;

differentials based on years of service and academic training are common; differentials based on grade level or subject matter specialities were eliminated in favor of the single salary schedule, but may be regaining popularity under the guise of "market sensitive" pay (English, 1984).

The controversy focuses on (1) differential pay based on quality of performance, e.g. merit pay, and (2) differential pay based on functional differences, e.g. doing more work or doing different work (Uzell, 1983; Barber and Klein, 1983; Dunwell, 1984; Lieberman, 1985). However, the confusion present has been compounded because "...some (career ladder plans) are merit-based; others combine performance and extended hours or contract years; still others are based on teachers assuming additional or differentiated duties (Cornett, 1985). What is different between earlier discussions and the present thrust are: (1) merit plans have become politically important at the highest state and national levels, with non-educators taking the lead, and (2) the concept of the "master teacher" has been introduced in most career ladder plans (Kapel, et al., 1985).

In an attempt to deal with differences among career ladder plans, we will treat merit pay plans separately before addressing career ladder plans and their relation to teacher motivation.

Merit Pay

The title of a recent article in no less than The American School Board Journal proclaimed "Our Nationwide Poll: Most Teachers Endorse the Merit Pay Concept." Actually, the researcher found that nearly two of three teachers agreed with the statement that "teachers who are more effective in the classroom should receive larger salary increases than teachers who are less effective." While only 17.6 % of the sample supported the current system of

basing salary increases on seniority and academic credentials alone, 41 % said that they would want "classroom effectiveness" to be given equal weight in determining salary increases. But, only slightly more than 3 % said they would want "classroom effectiveness" to be the sole standard for salary increases (Rist, 1983).

Gallup's 1984 survey of 2,000 teachers revealed that, although 76 % of the sample felt there were teachers in their school who were sufficiently outstanding to warrant merit pay, 64 % of the sample were opposed to merit pay. Here, teachers differed significantly from the general public. Only 32 % of the teachers favored the idea of merit pay for teachers, while 76 % of the public did. The main reasons for teacher opposition were that they felt it was difficult to give a fair evaluation, and that they felt merit pay would create morale problems among teachers (Gallup, 1984).

Perhaps, no other issue has created stronger differences between the teaching profession and the public it serves, between teachers and administrators, and within the profession itself. Brinks asserts that "...leaving merit increases out of a pay system deliberately ignores a major motivational tool, an instant feedback system based on acceptability of labor performance" (1983). Lieberman believes that merit pay, "...if implemented properly", has the potential to remedy the shortage of qualified persons entering teaching and the inability of teaching to retain qualified teachers (1985). Schneider has reported that "...empirical evidence and research data seem to be consistent...(however) the evidence against merit pay is not conclusive...." (1983). Although the evidence against merit pay may not be conclusive, one would have to believe that evidence for merit pay also is not conclusive.

The belief that merit pay is widely used in business and industry is

not supported by accumulated evidence (Barber and Klein, 1983). The House Committee on Education and Labor describes the results of performance-based pay in the private sector as "...mixed and inconclusive..." and warns that "...those who view merit pay as some easy, inexpensive, painless method of solving the nation's education problems are not realistic" (1983). French reports that the research on merit pay clearly shows that incentives must be substantial to have a positive impact and even then merit pay does not create the desired effect if substituted for appropriate across-the-board salary increases (French, 1985). And, English, who headed the A.S.C.D. Task Force on Merit Pay and Career Ladders, concludes that "...merit pay...in the current national context...is punitive and destructive, and will exacerbate the problems facing teaching rather than ameliorating them (English, 1984).

Certainly, the effects of those career ladder plans which include merit pay provisions must be treated separately and deliberately.

Career Ladder Plans

The Texas Career Ladder Plan (House Bill 72 Enacted by the 1984 Legislature of the State of Texas) includes most of the provisions found in other career ladder plans (The House Committee on Education and Labor, 1983; Cornett, 1985; French, 1985; Kapel, et al., 1985; Peterson and Mitchell, 1985; Wagner, 1985). The Texas career ladder plan may also substantiate the belief that Texas exerts a higher degree of control over school operations than other states.

The Texas Plan assigns teachers to career ladder levels and grants teaching certificates, including the Master Teacher Certificate, on the basis of (1) performance, (2) experience, (3) job-related education and advanced academic training, and (4) job assignments. Performance is determined by

appraisal of the teacher by state-endorsed appraisers (administrators, supervisors, and teachers) using a state-endorsed assessment instrument; entry to an advanced level requires increasingly superior appraisals from "satisfactory" to "exceeding expectations" to "clearly outstanding." Experience varies from the one year probationary period for entry to Level One to three to five years' experience at the preceding level depending on degrees and credit hours for entry to Levels Two through Four.

Job-related education consists of "higher education course work" in the subject area taught; however, "advanced academic training," a euphemism for state-approved in-service training, may be substituted for university credit. The duties which must be included in the Master Teacher's assignment are "...supervising student teachers; acting as team leader, mentor, or department chairman; conducting advanced academic training; and assessing level four candidates;" the bill specifically provides that the Master Teacher shall be "...insofar as is practicable, maintained in the classroom and not be assigned duties of an administrator" (1984 Legislature of the State of Texas).

The Career Ladder Salary Supplement provides an annual supplement of$2,000 for each level in addition to the minimum salary set by law, unless the district is forced to reduce that supplement to $ 1,500 for each level. Through the 1985-1986 academic year, local districts have been certifying teachers for Level One Entry and implementing teacher assessment programs and advanced academic training programs.

Teacher Motivation

Rebore poses a critical question for any pay system, not just teacher career ladder plans: "Does money stimulate an employee to put forth more effort?" and concludes "that money definitely affects performance under

certain circumstances (Rebore, 1981)(emphasis added). When minimum necessities have been satisfied, the motivational value given material incentives is extremely limited and almost entirely dependent on the creation of the attitude that individuals ought to want material things (Barnard, 1938).

However, money is also symbolic; it can represent almost anything an individual wants it to represent; and, it can mean whatever people want it to mean (Rebore, 1981; Hersey and Blanchard, 1982). Hence, money has varying degrees of importance to individuals depending on their backgrounds and experiences (Rebore, 1982). Barnard states that it is fallacious to believe that the attitude of employees toward management is governed primarily by economic motives (Barnard, 1938). Hersey and Blanchard conclude that "...money, the old reliable motivational tool, is not as almighty as it is supposed to be, ...(even) for production workers" (Hersey and Blanchard, 1982, pp. 40-41). And Frase, Hetzel, and Grant believe "that the major reason for failure (of merit pay) has been (the) basic assumption -- that money serves as an effective motivator" (Frase, Hetzel, and Grant, 1982).

Will merit pay or career ladder salary supplements really get teachers to work harder? They will if money were a primary reason for becoming a teacher, or lack of money a primary reason for becoming dissatisfied with teaching or leaving teaching.

However, a 1983 study found that "...the most frequently given reasons for entering the teaching profession were... (1) service...(2) working with students...(3) generally liking to work with people... (and) (4) participating in the development of children" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983, p. 54). A 1984 study found teacher burnout was related to need deficiencies in teacher motivation, especially "...those higher level need deficiencies affecting job

satisfaction (self-actualization, esteem) rather than...the lower level need deficiencies associated with job dissatisfaction (autonomy, security)" (Anderson and Iwanicki, 1984, p. 128)(emphasis added).

Nevertheless, teachers themselves state that they think that the primary reason teachers are leaving is because of low salaries (Gallup, 1984). But, "...only a few former teachers identified money as an important factor in their personal decisions to leave, and several explicitly noted that money was not the reason" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983, p. 56)(emphasis added).

Teachers, former teachers, and administrators concurred that low salaries were a major disadvantage; however, money was not perceived as a major source of job dissatisfaction. In fact, low salary was subordinate to other issues such as geographic location, personal freedom in the job, and the nature of the job itself. And, when teachers responded to the question about whether they would once again choose to become teachers, "...(a) one-third gave answers related to students and curriculum...(b) another third...(cited) issues related to personal growth...and (c) one-third...talked about other personal issues such as time, security, and money (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983).

Those teachers who said they had seriously considered leaving teaching cited salaries and working conditions as the biggest reasons; however, the possible actions they judged least helpful were "...basing pay on performance (merit pay) and paying extra for added responsibilities (career ladders)...." (Brandt, 1985, citing The 1985 Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher).

One of the problems with merit pay and career ladder plans stems from what English calls the "myth of the unitary profession" (English, 1984). Along with the general public and the legislatures, we tend to regard teachers

as a group, with similar likes and dislikes, influenced by the same satisfiers and dissatisfiers, affected in the same ways by the same set of extrinsic motivators.

Maslow's classic motivation theory insists that we must take into account a great many other factors. A satisfied need no longer motivates; however, the fulfillment of a need is dependent on the individual's perceptions and experiences. In fact, some individuals never feel that their basic needs have been fulfilled and remain at the bottom of the hierarchy among the group he calls "needy persons." For any individual, the satisfaction of even basic needs is possible only when certain preconditions exist: freedom, justice, orderliness, and challenge or stimulation. More significantly, the hierarchical structure itself functions within the context of an environment that is only relatively stable (Maslow, 1970; Goble 1970). Simply, individuals change, conditions change, needs change, the degree of need satisfaction changes, and motivators change.

Earlier, Barnard stated "...the scheme of incentives is probably the most unstable of the elements of the cooperative system..." and "...the willingness of any individual cannot be constant in degree" (Barnard, 1938, p. 85 and p. 158). A 1980 study of motivational differences among teachers and administrators reported (1) a variation of psychological needs based on teaching level (secondary, junior high, elementary), age, and sex, (2) significant differences in security need deficiencies based on race, sex, and position, and (3) differences in the fulfillment of desire for achievement, mastery, prestige, and recognition between whites and non-whites (Chisolm, Washington, and Thibodeaux, 1980). Wilkerson warns "...the present meritocratic system tends to confirm cultural biases about race, sex, and other factors unrelated to intelligence rather than challenge them"

(Wilkerson, 1982).

The most powerful motivational forces for teachers are a complex of intrinsic rewards including "...seeing students learn and succeed, believing one's job service to others is important, and being able to continue growing personally and professionally" (Bredeson, Fruth, and Kasten, 1983). Hawley points out that "...teachers neither rank pay particularly high as a source of motivation nor value upward mobility as much as they used to" (Hawley, 1985). And DeLamarter warns that external reinforcement, which merit pay may well represent, reduces the effect of any intrinsic motivation that is present (DeLamarter, 1980).

Redirecting Our Efforts

Hawley (1985) finds that:

> ...almost every study of teacher motivation, job satisfaction, or attrition concludes that the most important thing teachers want from their work is intrinsic satisfaction derived from contributions made to student achievement. Other needs teachers want to satisfy are similar to those valued by most other workers: self-esteem based on an awareness of one's expertise, recognition by peers and relevant others of professional competence, economic benefits, opportunities for self-direction, positive social interactions with peers and supervisors, protection from the arbitrary exercise of authority that might threaten job security or advancement possibilities, and opportunities for professional growth and development (Hawley, 1985, citing Hawley and Rosenholtz, 1984, and Rosenholtz and Smylie, 1984).

If this is true — and, certainly, I believe that it is -- what effect will merit pay and career ladders have on the professionalization of teaching?

Weldon asserts that practically all of the writings on merit pay for teachers — both pro and con — are based on "...the patently anti-professional belief..." that those who are not members of the profession should rate the competencies or merit of practitioners (Weldon, 1971).

Sergiovanni has issued an even sterner warning. He believes that competitive incentive systems inevitably lead to competition, that rewards and

punishments doled out by management inevitably result in increased competition and increased vulnerability of teachers to external control rather than increasing internal discipline and self responsibility (Sergiovanni, 1985). This appears to have been true for salary schedules which paid teachers more for additional training; teachers became interested in being paid more, not in improving their performance (Lieberman, 1985).

Simply, we may be going down the up staircase. Instead of increasing professionalization, career ladders may contradict basic professional values.

To be able to help develop greater intrinsic satisfaction among individual teachers, teacher educators, teacher supervisors, and educational administrators must redirect their attitudes and efforts. We will need to develop an approach to working with professionals from their first day in our pre-service preparation based on a consistent, comprehensive, continuous process.

The approach and the mechanisms related to that process have been clearly identified (Solomon, 1977; Chisolm, Washington, and Thibodeaux, 1980; Owens, 1981; House Committee on Education and Labor). The processes include:

(1) Performance appraisal interviews to share concerns, to develop an understanding of the difficulties the teacher is experiencing, and to identify his or her developmental needs.

(2) Potential appraisal and development to identify the potential of the teacher to perform new roles and responsibilities.

(3) Feedback and performance coaching to help teachers become more effective and to provide guidance in improving performance capabilities.

(4) Career planning to make long-range plans known to teachers and to help them know the possibilities for their own growth and career opportunities.

(5) Training linked with performance appraisal and career development to enhance, update, or develop specific skills.

(6) Organizational research and systems development (OD) to assess the psychological health of the organization and various units within the organization to improve their functioning.

(7) Rewards to teams, departments, and other units as well as to individuals for innovations and use of capabilities to encourage positive attitudes and skills.

(8) Employee welfare and quality of work life which focus on the environment within the organization, continually examine employee needs, and meet them to the extent feasible.

(9) Human resources information stored in a central human resources data bank to identify employees for consideration for special projects, additional training, or higher-level jobs (Rao, 1985).

Only through a total commitment to a human resource development system can we engage the fundamental motivation of the individual teacher to increase productivity and excellence in schools.

Footnotes

1. States reported to be developing performance-based incentive programs: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, New Jersey, North Caroline, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin.

States reported to have a mandate to develop such programs: Deleware, Kentucky, Mississippi, New Mexico, South Dakota, and West Virginia.

States reported to have passed legislation to develop statewide career ladder programs or pilot projects: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, and Missouri (Cornett, 1985).

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